The Qualitative Report

Volume 30 | Number 9 Book Review 9

9-30-2025

"Incredibly Powerful and Well-Crafted" - A Review of Pandemic Death Discourse: Denial, Disparity and the Promise of Communication

Elda Kanzki-Veloso Ph.D.
Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA, veloso@nova.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr

Part of the Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons, Educational Psychology Commons, Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons, and the Social Statistics Commons

Recommended Citation

Kanzki-Veloso, E. (2025). "Incredibly powerful and well-crafted" - A review of Pandemic death discourse: Denial, disparity and the promise of communication. The Qualitative Report, 30(9), 4384-4391. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2025.8387

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.

THE QUALITATIVE REPORT
DISCOVER ONE OF OUR VIRTUAL QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WORKSHOPS WITH INDUSTRY EXPERTS.
JOIN US ONLINE. LIMITED SPOTS AVAILABLE. BOOK YOURS NOW!
TQR
THE QUALITATIVE REPORT
WHERE THE WORLD COMES TO LEARN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

"Incredibly Powerful and Well-Crafted" - A Review of Pandemic Death Discourse: Denial, Disparity and the Promise of Communication

Abstract

This book analysis, focused on *Pandemic Death Discourse: Denial, Disparity and the Promise of Communication* (Alvarez et al., 2025), expressed a deeply human expectation from readers. The reviewer wanted more than just straightforward facts; there was a deep yearning for real emotion, personal stories, and meaningful connections that helped people cope with fear and uncertainty. They emphasized the importance of immersing readers in the rich experiences of grief, resilience, and hope. There was a need to feel the heavy impact of overlooked lives. The desire for a sense of outrage regarding the disposable nature of certain lives emerged, as well as concerns about the anxiety caused by the virus and the troubling effects of technology on our identities. The reviewer connected with the intense anxiety and profound loneliness found in online support groups, the tension in a professor's virtual classroom when discussing mortality, and the deep recognition that art can inspire while navigating collective trauma. The conclusion was envisioned as a "profound, soul-searching reflection and a powerful, urgent call to action," reshaping the very purpose of education towards empathy. Despite the desire for more personal narratives interwoven with factual accounts, the reviewer ultimately found the book "incredibly powerful and well-crafted," with its clear structure effectively drawing them in and leaving a lasting impact. This resonance underscores the book's ability to inspire deep reflection on the pandemic's extensive human influence.

Keywords

human experience, emotional connection, unheard stories, digital connection, collective trauma, empathy, resilience, mental health, art & reflection, death, education's purpose, morality, isolation/loneliness

Creative Commons License

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License.

Acknowledgements

I want to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Ron Chenail, whose step-by-step book review guidelines were essential in crafting this reflection. His guidance allowed me to delve beyond simply noting the facts and general ideas presented in Pandemic Death Discourse: Denial, Disparity and the Promise of Communication. Instead, it truly helped me connect with the voices behind the book, its deeper messages, and the human experiences woven throughout. My own journey through the pandemic, with its personal struggles, really amplified my need to connect with these stories, making the entire review

process a very personal exploration.

This book review is available in The Qualitative Report: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol30/iss9/9

The Qualitative Report 2025 Volume 30, Number 9, 4384-4391
https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2025.8387

"Incredibly Powerful and Well-Crafted" - A Review of *Pandemic Death Discourse: Denial, Disparity and the Promise of Communication*

Elda Kanzki-Veloso
Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA

This book analysis, focused on *Pandemic Death Discourse: Denial, Disparity and the Promise of Communication* (Alvarez et al., 2025), expressed a deeply human expectation from readers. The reviewer wanted more than just straightforward facts; there was a deep yearning for real emotion, personal stories, and meaningful connections that helped people cope with fear and uncertainty. They emphasized the importance of immersing readers in the rich experiences of grief, resilience, and hope. There was a need to feel the heavy impact of overlooked lives. The desire for a sense of outrage regarding the disposable nature of certain lives emerged, as well as concerns about the anxiety caused by the virus and the troubling effects of technology on our identities. The reviewer connected with the intense anxiety and profound loneliness found in online support groups, the tension in a professor's virtual classroom when discussing mortality, and the deep recognition that art can inspire while navigating collective trauma. The conclusion was envisioned as a "profound, soul-searching reflection and a powerful, urgent call to action," reshaping the very purpose of education towards empathy. Despite the desire for more personal narratives interwoven with factual accounts, the reviewer ultimately found the book "incredibly powerful and well-crafted," with its clear structure effectively drawing them in and leaving a lasting impact. This resonance underscores the book's ability to inspire deep reflection on the pandemic's extensive human influence.

Keywords: human experience, emotional connection, unheard stories, digital connection, collective trauma, empathy, resilience, mental health, art & reflection, death, education's purpose, morality, isolation/loneliness

Introduction

Overall Impression: Navigating through pandemic narratives often felt like sorting through a sea of repetitive news summaries and clinical studies. Despite recent events, the topic had become overloaded with discourse, leaving me at times eager to move on. What I truly desired from this book was a heartfelt exploration of the human side of that unprecedented time. Throughout the chapters, I yearned for an empathetic presence, a comforting hand that could guide me through the shadows, aiming for a visceral "gut-punch sense of being there." I craved genuine emotion, the unheard stories, and the deep connections that helped us endure fear and uncertainty. I hoped the authors would immerse us in the intimate realms of grief, resilience, and hope, offering profound insights with each chapter. I longed for their compassionate presence to guide us through the darkness together, to feel their support as we navigated those challenging times.

The Reviewer Connection to the Book

The reviewer's connection to the book felt intensely personal, as if she herself had lived through the profound emotional currents of the pandemic. Her yearning was not for a detached, academic understanding, but for a visceral immersion – a "gut-punch sense of being there." She consistently articulated a profound need to "feel" the realities discussed in each chapter, whether it was the "bone-deep weight" of devaluation experienced by essential workers or the agonizing ache of digital goodbyes. This deep-seated desire for emotional resonance revealed her own empathetic lens and her hope that the authors had shared this perspective, transforming data into lived experience. Her interpretation was deeply rooted in the conviction that true comprehension of the pandemic's impact demanded an encounter with its raw emotional, psychological, and societal tolls on a truly human level, moving beyond the facts to a space of shared vulnerability. *Pandemic Death Discourse: Denial, Disparity and the Promise of Communication* (Alvarez et al., 2025) emerged during a time filled with narratives about the pandemic, just when we were all eager to shift our focus toward the future. Yet, while reading I found myself longing for heartfelt journey into the human experiences that defined that unique period. Beyond the numbers, I craved authentic emotion and personal stories that often went unheard, stories that could highlight the deep connections that kept us anchored during such turbulent times. I found myself wondering if the writer could weave more emotion throughout the chapters, uncovering the meaning behind these stories and addressing all the unspoken truths—like the inequities in how lives were valued, the isolation brought by digital connections, and the lingering trauma that touched us all. A narrative that truly captures these feelings could create a genuine bond with readers, making us feel as if we were walking beside those who endured and overcame it all.

The Reviewer Views of the Author

The reviewer perceived the author not just as a writer, but as a potential empathic guide through the pandemic's complex emotional terrain. She anticipated an author willing to confront the unspoken, difficult truths of the era, such as the inherent inequities in the valuing of human lives, the isolating paradox of digital connections, and the pervasive trauma that had settled across society. The reviewer envisioned an author capable of crafting a narrative that allowed readers to "feel" these experiences deeply, forging a profound and personal bond with the subject matter.

Chapter 1

My Take

This opening, with its rather academic title, must immediately grab us by the lapels and shake us awake to the chilling truth: some lives, you see, are considered less valuable than others. And this isn't just a pandemic thing; this was the unspoken reality long before the virus even hit. It’s not enough to intellectually get "neoliberal philosophy" or "economic systems." Oh no, I need to feel the bone-deep weight of that truth settling on the shoulders of someone whose very existence was already deemed… expendable. Picture the pre-pandemic sighs of that underpaid essential worker, the subtle, insidious devaluation of their days, their health, their future, which the crisis then brutally, unblinkingly amplified. The authors could totally hit this by starting with a quiet, utterly unsettling vignette: maybe a bus driver in a crowded city, long, long before masks became a second skin, feeling that low, anxious hum about their lack of sick days, their flimsy health insurance. Or a single parent, staring at soaring rent,

making agonizing calculations about their kids' futures, knowing full well they were trapped by a system that placed "profit over people." This chapter shouldn't just set up arguments; it absolutely must immerse us in the profound emotional burden that this "necroeconomic" way of thinking laid upon the most vulnerable, long before a virus dared to make it lethal. It needs to make us feel the pre-existing injustices, a deep, unsettling dread some folks just knew, implicitly, was already there.

Chapter 2

My Take

This chapter promises to explore how our lives, and sadly, our deaths, became utterly mediated by screens and digital connections during the pandemic. But I'm not after some detached analysis of apps and algorithms; I demand to feel the ache of that weird, new digital connection. Imagine the agonizing click of a video call – the last, pixilated, heart-wrenching glimpse of a loved one's face, the desperate, futile attempt to convey a lifetime of love and final goodbyes through a flickering, tiny screen, knowing in your soul it just wasn't enough. Or picture the raw, burning frustration of an elderly relative, wrestling with a brand-new tablet, just trying to reach out to their family, feeling that vast, isolating chasm that technology, ironically, both bridged and emphasized. The authors could share a heartbreaking story: a child drawing crude, earnest pictures for a grandparent they hadn't seen in months, pushing them into the cold, digital ether, hoping, praying for a sign back. Or the profound, unsettling loneliness of an online funeral, where grief felt shared, yes, but also acutely, piercingly solitary. This chapter must make us acutely, personally aware of how technology became both a desperately needed lifeline and, sometimes, a cruelly inadequate barrier, leaving us to mourn with new, often profoundly unsatisfying, tools, amplifying the chilling unreality of a world suddenly defined by tiny, glowing screens.

Chapter 3

My Take

"The Aesthetic of COVID"? What an intensely provocative title! This chapter could transcend mere academic discussion and plunge us, body and soul, into the very feel of the pandemic's unique visual and sensory landscape. It's not about analyzing images from a safe distance; it's about making us inhabit that world, feeling its textures, its absences. Think about the sudden, stark, almost violent emptiness of once-bustling streets, now replaced by desolate, echoing pathways and the haunting quiet where laughter used to live. Feel the uncanny sight of literally everyone in masks – the devastating loss of facial expressions, the muffled sounds of muffled voices, the way our eyes, suddenly, had to carry all the immense, unspoken emotion. The authors could paint a vivid scene: a city park, usually a riot of vibrant life, now dotted with solitary, isolated figures, their eyes, even from a distance, conveying a universal, profound fear. Or that jarring, gut-wrenching contrast of a joyous family photo from pre-pandemic days, now viewed through the chilling lens of tragic, irreversible loss. This chapter must evoke the chilling beauty, the profound, unsettling strangeness, and the almost unbearable visual weight of a world abruptly, violently remade, where every masked face, every empty space, every news photo of a makeshift mass grave, held a silent, agonizing story. I want to feel the pervasive sense of unease, that constant low thrum of anxiety, and the way our senses, suddenly, became hyper-attuned to the smallest signs of illness, fear, and aching

Chapter 4

My Take

This chapter's title, it just screams of the inherent, infuriating injustice we all witnessed, plain as day. It's not nearly enough to simply state that some lives were deemed "disposable." No, I demand to feel the burning indignation, the wrenching, almost physical empathy for those caught in this brutal, dehumanizing calculus. Imagine the bone-weary essential worker, labelled "indispensable" enough to labor through the hellscape without adequate protection, yet simultaneously "disposable" enough that their health, their very life, wasn't genuinely prioritized. Show me the face of a dedicated caregiver, forced to continue working in a brutal, high-risk environment, knowing, knowing the dangers, feeling the deep, crushing weight of their family's utter reliance on their meager, often dangerous, wages. The authors could offer a quiet, heartbreaking moment from a "Tribute Gallery" (Alvarez et al., 2025), where a single, blurry photograph holds the entire, devastating story of a life – a life perhaps deemed utterly disposable by the cold, calculating system, but immeasurable, boundless, to those who loved them fiercely. This chapter must make us feel the bitter, acrid sting of recognizing who truly bears the brutal brunt of societal neglect, the profound, sickening unfairness of a system that extracts labor while so casually discarding lives, and the quiet, simmering rage that inevitably comes with witnessing such profound, undeniable inequity.

Chapter 5

My Take

This chapter's title? That's not just a title; it's a gut punch, an almost audible plea. It absolutely demands an unvarnished, unflinching plunge into the terrifyingly intertwined horrors of the pandemic and deep-seated racial injustice. "Black despair" and "George Floyd's death" (Alvarez et al., 2025) are mentioned in the text, and this isn't some dry political analysis; it's about the raw, desperate, soul-shattering cry of a community pushed to its absolute breaking point. I want to feel the suffocating fear of systemic racism magnified by a literal breath-stealing virus. Imagine the collective, agonizing anguish of a community watching another Black life tragically extinguished, brutally juxtaposed with the struggle for breath from COVID-19, blurring the lines between pure injustice and devastating disease in the most horrifying way. Show me the utterly exhausted Black nurse, working brutal double shifts, then returning home to a community ravaged by both the virus and centuries of historical inequities, feeling the crushing, unbearable weight of that double burden. This chapter needs to make us feel the profound, multi-layered trauma, the silent battles fought behind closed doors, and the horrifying realization that for some, the struggle to breathe was not just a symptom of illness, but a pervasive, agonizing, historical reality. It simply must convey the desperate, ragged pleas for help, for air, for justice, that resonated through the streets and through hospital wards alike, making the reader feel the heavy, oppressive weight of that collective, unbearable suffering.

Chapter 6

My Take

So, this looks like a deeper, perhaps more philosophical, dive into those themes from Chapter 2. It's not just about the technologies themselves; it's about how they profoundly, almost spiritually, blurred the very lines of ourselves, our bodies, and even how we understand

authorship in the pandemic. I'm craving the intimate; unsettling details of how these digital interfaces reshaped our very sense of being. Imagine the quiet, persistent click of a patient's pulse oximeter, those stark numbers on the screen becoming a detached, yet utterly, terrifyingly vital, measure of their very existence – their self, their humanity, reduced to raw data points. Or consider the strange, almost sacred intimacy of connecting with total strangers online, sharing raw, naked fears and vulnerabilities, somehow creating new, fragile communities of grief and support where physical touch was, quite simply, impossible. The text notes how social media may seem contradictory or incongruent (Alvarez et al., 2025). I want to feel that exact tension: the simultaneous blessing and curse of platforms like Twitter, where solidarity could miraculously form, but also where vicious misinformation and raw, exploited grief could easily spiral into chaos. This chapter must make us feel the strange, unsettling ways our identities and connections became utterly mediated by technology, both distancing us in profound ways and, paradoxically, drawing us into new, often deeply uncomfortable, forms of intimacy.

Chapter 7

My Take

Oh, this chapter holds immense, almost overwhelming potential for raw, unfiltered emotion. It's not enough to simply state that mental health suffered; I want to sit, virtually, right there with individuals in an online community, feeling the palpable anxiety, the insidious creep of despair, and the crushing, soul-deep loneliness. Show me the quiet desperation hidden within a forum post, that hesitant, almost whispered admission of suicidal thoughts, met not with judgment, but with an outpouring of desperate, frantic support from strangers, a virtual, collective embrace across the digital divide. The chapter's "Final Thoughts" openly acknowledge grappling with "trauma and pain" and the dire challenge of "mental health systems under duress" (Alvarez et al., 2025). The authors must share the story of someone who found genuine solace and a fragile, precious reason to keep going within these digital spaces, their suffocating isolation momentarily broken by the sheer kindness of unseen others, and how that fragile, ad-hoc support system kept them afloat when traditional systems utterly crumbled. This chapter needs to make us feel the profound, collective weight of trauma, the silent battles fought behind so many closed doors, and the fragile, yet fiercely powerful, connections forged in the shared darkness of online communities. I demand to feel the vulnerability, the fear, but also, crucially, the flicker of hope found when desperate voices are, at long last, truly heard and acknowledged, even if only through a screen.

Chapter 8

My Take

This chapter, told from a professor's raw, firsthand perspective, promises to be something deeply personal and utterly reflective. It's not about abstract pedagogical challenges, not really; it's about the very human, very lonely struggle of a professor trying to navigate the unspoken, terrifying anxieties of life and death, right there, in a classroom setting, during a global crisis. I want to feel the tangible tension in that virtual classroom: the students' unasked questions, heavy as lead, hanging in the digital air, coupled with the professor's own palpable trepidation about bringing up the screaming elephant in the room—death itself. Imagine the subtle cues: a student's haunted eyes flickering across a video call, a sudden, inexplicable quietness, a tremor in a voice when discussing something utterly unrelated. The "Final Thoughts" section here powerfully hints at the professor's own profound exhaustion and their

personal journey to recovery, even bravely mentioning therapy. The author must share a specific, agonizing moment when they almost breached the subject, then hesitated, feeling the immense, crushing weight of the topic and their ethical responsibility, while simultaneously, perhaps, battling their own raw pandemic fatigue. Or a moment when a student, incredibly, did try to bring it up, and how the professor, perhaps caught off guard, navigated that delicate, deeply human interaction. This chapter simply must make us feel the profound, aching difficulty of teaching, of learning, and frankly, of simply being human in a time when the biggest, most terrifying reality was often unspoken, yet agonizingly ever-present in every single, virtual interaction. I want to feel the professor's quiet anguish, their empathetic dilemma, and the unspoken grief that permeated even the most academic of spaces.

Chapter 9

My Take

Okay, this chapter sounds like a truly fascinating, compelling exploration of how art, specifically film, can somehow help us process and understand the utterly incomprehensible. It's not just about dry film analysis; it's about using cinematic narratives to confront the visceral, terrifying realities of contagion and the desperate human need for connection. The explicit mention of "93 Days" (Alvarez et al., 2025) and Nigeria's successful Ebola efforts is a compelling factual hook, but to truly connect, I need to feel the resonance of that historical story with our own, recent COVID-19 experience. I want to feel the shiver of recognition, that sudden jolt when watching a scene unfold, realizing how a fictional portrayal from years ago chillingly mirrors our terrifying, brand-new reality. Imagine the charged atmosphere of a classroom discussion after watching a powerful film about a past epidemic – the students' silent, knowing glances, the unspoken echoes of their own lived experiences, suddenly recognizing the same primal fears, the same sheer, stubborn humanity. The authors must share a specific, unforgettable story of how "93 Days," or another potent film, connected with a student on a deeply, unexpectedly personal level, perhaps sparking a conversation about their own family's struggles, making a historical event feel utterly immediate, raw, and bleedingly relevant. This chapter simply *must* make us feel the profound power of art to illuminate, to challenge, and to provide a safe, albeit mediated, space to confront the raw terror and the complex ethics of a world grappling with invisible threats and interconnected, inescapable fates. I want to feel the catharsis of shared viewing, that collective sigh of recognition, and the unique, piercing insights that only art, in its purest form, can provide into the human condition during a crisis. And it’s precisely here, too, that the connection to Margaret Slim’s ideology of robust collective action and communal care (as brilliantly hinted at in the text about her work inspiring the chapter) could truly, powerfully shine. Instead of just stating her ideas, tell me a story – a vivid, compelling narrative of someone, perhaps a student or an ordinary citizen, who, inspired by the film, genuinely embraced communal aid, illustrating how this "collective power" played out in a real person's life during COVID-19, forging unexpected bonds of meaning and hope amidst the desolation.

Chapter 10

My Take

This final chapter, rather than being a dry, academic summary, absolutely must feel like a moment of profound, soul-searching reflection and a powerful, urgent call to action, deeply rooted in the hard-won emotional lessons of the pandemic. "Death knocking on classroom

doors" is not just an image; it's a chilling, unforgettable reality (Alvarez et al., 2025). It's not merely about new teaching methods; it's about how the pandemic irrevocably, fundamentally, altered the very purpose and empathy of education itself. I want to feel the quiet, fierce determination of educators facing a classroom—physical or virtual—that has been forever changed by loss and collective trauma. The text hints at addressing students' disengagement and depression" and the crucial need for "frank discussions of mortality (Alvarez et al., 2025). Picture a teacher, now more profoundly attuned to the subtle, often hidden, signs of student distress, bravely creating space for vulnerability, not just rote learning or test prep. What are the untold stories of educators who, truly, went above and beyond their assigned roles, stepping up to support grieving students, to hold sacred space for collective sadness, perhaps even sharing their own struggles in a way that forged profound, unbreakable trust? This chapter must make us feel the immense responsibility and the newly ignited purpose of pedagogy in a post-pandemic world – a world where we can no longer afford to pretend death doesn't exist, where empathy and critical thinking must be woven into every single lesson, into every interaction. It should leave us with a powerful sense of hopeful possibility that the classroom, once a place often insulated from the messy, agonizing realities of life, can now, finally, become a truly human, deeply empathetic space for critical thinking, for shared healing, and for bravely acknowledging our shared, fragile mortality.

Conclusion

The way chapters are divided into clear sections really draws you in and keeps you wanting to read more. While it might be nice to see a bit more personal storytelling and individual experiences alongside the factual accounts of the pandemic, this book is incredibly powerful and well-crafted. It resonates deeply, making it hard to put down and leaving a lasting impression.

References

Alvarez, M. F., Hernández-Ojeda, C., Joy, A. B., & Kepes, G. S. (2025). *Pandemic death discourse: Denial, disparity and the promise of communication*. McFarland.

Author Note

Dr. Elda Kanzki-Veloso serves as a Full Professor in the Department of Counseling at Nova Southeastern University's College of Psychology, bringing over 20 years of experience to her role, where she efficiently manages the practicum and internship placement process for students. She holds a Ph.D. in Counseling with a focus on Family Therapy, in addition to an M.S. in Counseling with a specialization in Special Education and a B.S. in Psychology. Dr. Kanzki-Veloso's research spans several critical areas, including support for veterans, substance use among adolescents, and the integration of technology in various educational formats, including online, hybrid, and traditional settings. Her strong emphasis on evidence-based research, particularly concerning adolescent substance abusers and their families as well as veteran populations, underscores her dedication to enriching her field while contributing to her students' professional development and fostering a positive community impact. Please direct correspondence to veloso@nova.edu

Author Contribution: My personal engagement with *Pandemic Death Discourse: Denial, Disparity and the Promise of Communication* for this review went beyond a surface reading, allowing for a genuine immersion into its human narratives and documented realities.

Acknowledgements: I want to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Ron Chenail, whose step-by-step book review guidelines were essential in crafting this reflection. His guidance allowed me to delve beyond simply noting the facts and general ideas presented in *Pandemic Death Discourse: Denial, Disparity and the Promise of Communication*. Instead, it truly helped me connect with the voices behind the book, its deeper messages, and the human experiences woven throughout. My own journey through the pandemic, with its personal struggles, really amplified my need to connect with these stories, making the entire review process a very personal exploration.

Copyright 2025: Elda Kanzki-Veloso and Nova Southeastern University.

Article Citation

Kanzki-Veloso, E. (2025). "Incredibly powerful and well-crafted" - A review of *Pandemic death discourse: Denial, disparity and the promise of communication*. *The Qualitative Report, 30*(9), 4384-4391. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2025.8387